

1 Interviewee: Tommy Contrades

2 Location: Home of Andy Bushnell, Wailua Homesteads

3 Date: Oct. 18, 2010, 2:30 pm – 4:30 pm (approx.)

4 Team: Carol Bain, Rhea Palma, Andy Bushnell

5 Oral History project: Island Movers & Shakers of the 20th Century

6 00:34.9

7 Interviewer: Tommy, thank you, for being with us today.

8 Tommy: It's my pleasure.

9 Interviewer: Can we start with your full name and where you live?

10 Tommy: My full name is Thomas Patrick Contrades. And I live at 171-8 Alani Alii Place in
11 Kapaa.

12 Interviewer: Where you born here on Kauai?

13 Tommy: I was born and raised here, yes.

14 Interviewer: So can you tell me a little about your family, like your family occupations?
15

16 Tommy: My father was Joseph Contrades, Jr. He was a superintendent in Hawaiian
17 Canneries Down in Kapaa. My mother was Dora Helen Souza Contrades and she
18 was a housewife. She never worked, never drove, she stayed home and took care
19 of us. Of course, that was a full-time job because there are 10 of us. I have 6
20 sisters and 3 brothers.

21

22 Interviewer: We're there any others, other than your parents, your brothers and sisters,
23 were there others who were important to you while you were growing up?
24

25 Tommy: Oh! When I was younger I spent a great deal of my time in Kapaa with my
26 grandmother. My dad would take me down there and I'd stay with my grandma, her
27 name was, she was a Kaauwai and I stayed with her, ran around with my cousins. It
28 was a great life right there in Waipouli, right where the Bull Shed is now? The house
29 is right nearby. And that's where I learned to swim in the canal there and there was
30 tons of us, kids was always around. And it was a very different lifestyle because it
31 was very low traffic. In fact none of what is there today was there at the time. There
32 was no shopping areas, nothing, was just raw land. And we swam and we fished
33 and we went out in the morning and we went back in the afternoon and nobody
34 worried about you because everybody knew where you were, and there was
35 nothing to get into trouble with. So, you just had a real nice, simple lifestyle.
36

37Interviewer: Did you work in the canneries yourself, your family?

38

39Tommy: Oh yes, we all did. Yeah. Summers, of course. I started working in the
40 pineapple industry when I was 12, because it was our society then was very
41 different, it was basically agricultural. And so, you either worked in the cannery or
42 you worked in the pineapple fields, or you worked in the sugar cane fields, but that's
43 where we all went to work. And you could work while you were young, you could
44 only work 20 hours a week, and I remember my first paycheck was 26 dollars and
45 25 cents, and I was so proud of that because they gave it to me and I gave it to my
46 mom. And she took all of it (laughs). But you know, big family we all had to help out.
47 Every summer was like that. Tommy: That's how you got to know everybody, all
48 your friends. But um, when I was board the population of the island of Kauai was
49 19,000 people. That's it. Very few families could afford to, you know, have all the
50 things we now have in this world. We didn't have a television, you know? It's really
51 funny because yesterday I was talking with my kids and telling them about the
52 telephone on the wall, when you had to dial, and an operator came on and spoke to
53 you when you wanted someone. And there are 14 other families on the same line,
54 so they could listen in on your conversation, if they so desired (laughs). It was a
55 very, very different life. It was a really good life and you knew everybody. I knew all
56 the neighbors on our street. I grew up on Kawaihau Road and I knew everybody.
57 You played with everybody. If you misbehaved, the family that was watching you,
58 nothing wrong with them spanking you. You got punished, it was immediate
59 (laughs). The you went home and they would tell mom and dad and you get it again.
60 So you tried to behave much as possible.

610:04:50.2

62Tommy: It was a really nice lifestyle, I really, I'm kinda sorry that kids today don't get to
63 do that. 'Cause you know, when you work in the fields, it's hard work but at the
64 same time you build up friendships, you work with older people, you work with
65 people your own age, you learn a lot of things. And the money wasn't great, but it
66 helped to feed your family. And all of us, actually, now when I stop and talk with my
67 classmates and stuff, we were kind of poor then, you know. But everybody was kind
68 of poor, so it didn't matter. You all lived together in the same lifestyle. I remember
69 Christmases my mom would bake--she was a great baker. She's Portuguese, so
70 she made sweet bread, Portuguese sweet bread. And she'd make for the whole
71 neighborhood. And we wrapped them, we'd all bake, for hours you'd be baking.
72 We'd go to every family and you give a sweet bread. And then those families would
73 give you something, and that's how we all grew up. I mean, there was no
74 supermarkets to go to, you had gardens in your yard and fruit trees. If there's a
75 fisherman, you'd bring fish. You'd share with them your taro, or your poi, or
76 whatever you raised. We had rabbits, we often shared that with other families, and
77 that's how you lived here. It wasn't going down to the store, because there was no
78 store to go down to. There was no Big Save, no Foodland, no Safeway. In fact, I
79 think there was Kojima Store and Nakamura Market down in Kapaa. Those are the
80 only two markets. The tofu man used to come by with his pole on his shoulders and
81 the two rice cans with the tofu inside, calling out tofu. You got your tofu. The
82 vegetable man would come to your house in his little truck. In the back was all his
83 fruit and vegetables and you brought your stuff from him. The fisherman would walk
84 up and down yelling, "Akule! Akule!" You'd stop him and you go buy your fish. You
85 didn't ever have to go down to the store, the stores were just for canned goods or
86 things you didn't have. You'd call up a rancher if you needed meat and he'd deliver
87 the meat to your house and you'd have to wrap the meat yourself and put it away.
88 So, it was very, very different.

89And I'm not that old but it really was. It was very different, but it was a great life living
90 there.

91

92Interviewer: It sounds like your family and your friends and your neighbors were a real
93 positive influence for you, early in your life.

94

95Tommy: Definitely, yes, yes, they all were.

96

97Interviewer: How was school? Where did you go?

98Tommy: I attended St. Catherine's Catholic School, right near Kapaa High. We were
99 taught by the Sisters of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the BVMs as they were called. My
100 parents are both Catholic, so we were raised in the Catholic faith all our lives. From
101 there, Andy just asked me this question, I attended St. Steven's seminary for high
102 school. I studied to be a Catholic priest.

103

104Interviewer: And where was that?

105

106Tommy: That's on Oahu, on the Pali, overlooking Kailua. It's a well-known place; it's
107 called the St. Stevens Diocesan Synonar, still owned by the Catholic Church. And
108 then I left after three years, and I came back home, and I attended Kapaa High
109 School for a year, and I graduated from there. And then I went on to Chaminade
110 College. And after Chaminade then I began my work.

111

112Interviewer: Your work . . . and so that leads me to . . . you have such a history of
113 leadership in the community. You worked in politics, participated in government,
114 what influenced you to move into that direction after you left Chaminade? Was
115 there something that happened in college?

116

117Tommy: No, not in college. Actually, it started with my father. The old-timers would tell
118 you my father used to be called Mr. Republican. And he was. He was a staunch
119 Republican. I can remember when . . . remember when Richard Nixon ran against
120 John F. Kennedy? Now if you were Catholic, you were expected to vote for John
121 Kennedy, right? And we were campaigning for Richard Nixon. I remember we were
122 down by the Catholic Church, holding signs, and I was young. My two sisters and I
123 were holding signs for Richard Nixon, and the nuns walked by to go to vote at
124 Kapaa School. And so they scolded us, "You shouldn't be doing that, you should be
125 campaigning for Kennedy." We told our dad and our dad went down to the school
126 and he told the nuns this has nothing to do with religion. This has to do with our
127 belief in our form of government, and we're Republicans, and we're voting
128 Republican! And it was a big scandal about that but that's what my dad taught us.
129 And that's how we were. So, I grew up in a Republican household and that's how I
130 became involved in politics. Because when Governor Quinn, William F. Quinn was
131 running for governor? He used to come to our house. My dad would pick him up, he
132 and Jimmy Kealoha, would come to the house and they'd strategize. And I'd be
133 sitting there, I was just a young boy, and I'd sit there and I'd listen. And when my
134 dad went out campaigning, I'd go with him, we'd travel the entire island.
135 Campaigning in those days was very different from what it is today. You had rallies
136 in all the little towns, and they'd put a stage, and the politicians would go up and
137 talk. And if you liked what they said, you tooted your horn or if you didn't, you
138 booed. But was like a . . . they had entertainment, they had hula dancers, they had
139 music, they used to have food. So it was like a big community gathering. And
140 everybody talked. I mean, you all talked about the different candidates and things.
141 And we didn't have stickers. We used to take old sheets and put the candidates
142 name, you painted it on. And then you stuck it or tied it on to the back of your car.
143 And for all during campaign time you'd see people driving around with these sheets
144 stuck to the back of their car with the campaign of the person's name on it. You
145 didn't have stickers and all those fancy things, you know. But I grew up with that.
146 And because my dad was an official in the Republican Party, of course, we all grew
147 up with that kind of background. Politics was just part of our lives.

148

149I knew lots of politicians that didn't think anything of it. Umm, Senator Akaka and my dad
150 were the closest of friends. When Senator Akaka would come to Kauai to campaign,
151 he'd call my father and he'd pick him up and the Republican would make fun of the
152 Democrat and the Democrat would tease the Republican. But they were close,
153 close friends. And so, when I first went to Washington, D.C. for my first trip I went to
154 go visit him and he told me stories about him and my father and all the wonderful
155 things they did. And how my mom used to cook his favorite meals and he'd come
156 and eat at the house. And I said, but you're a Democrat! He says, "Oh but our father
157 and I were good friends from when we were young kids." So! That was I guess part
158 of our lives. We never thought about it, it's just what we did, you know, we went with
159 dad, 'cause dad took us everywhere. I mean, he didn't leave us at home. He wanted
160 us to learn. And he always taught me that . . . my mom, too . . . they always told all
161 of us you didn't just live in a vacuum. You lived in a world, you lived in a community.
162 And you didn't just take care of your family, you cannot just worry about them, we
163 have to worry about everyone because your family is affected by everyone else.
164 So, it's your responsibility, your duty to go out and become involved in your
165 community. And he said, make the place a better place. He said, you cannot do
166 anything if you just sit at home and complain. Go out and do things! And so, from a
167 very young age, there was always a part of our lives. And I think all of our brothers
168 and sisters, and my children, are the same way. They all participated in some area,
169 whether it was nonprofits, or you know, the political arena, and we all did it. It was
170 just the way dad taught us to be.

171

1720:12:59.9

173Interviewer: After Chaminade, what were your stepping-stones? You had a family, you
174 went to school, and then ILWU. That's at the top of your resume, but was there
175 something before that?

176

177Tommy: You know, I got married when I was in college and we had our first son. And
178 then I went away to work on the Big Island of Hawaii. And I was away from home,
179 for uh . . . I managed a tour company. So, uh, it didn't work out too well because I
180 didn't like being away from Kauai, I really didn't. It lasted nine months, and I said I
181 got to go home. Kauai was in me, I just couldn't be away from home. So I left and
182 came back to Kauai, and I started working. I was a tour driver for Robert's Tours for
183 nine years. And during that time, you know with my dad's influence, I'd go out and
184 help him campaign and stuff. But I slowly changed my thoughts from being a
185 Republican, and that's when I registered to become a Democrat. And then we, uh,
186 the drivers decided that we'd unionize, we'd organize, so we joined the union. And
187 that's when the ILWU came into being. And not long after that they asked me if I'd
188 be willing to come to work for them. So, I became what is known as the division
189 representative. Yeah. It's an appointed position and I was assigned to take care of
190 the tourism division of the Kauai division. The ILWU is, although it's one union, is
191 called Local 142. It's spread out into divisions, each island is a division. And so they
192 have their own division director and business agents, and they have one
193 representative. The business agents and the division director are elected.

194

195Tommy: I was appointed for three terms, and then I ran for office myself. But of course,
196 once I became a member of the ILWU, I think the greatest influence in my life was a
197 man by [Spelling? 0:15:12.0] the name of Haruo Dyna (?) Nakamoto. And Dyna (?)
198 is famous on Kauai as far as his work in the union field, but Dyna was like my
199 second dad. He really was. And he always told me, he says, "You know, yes, it's
200 important what we do and yes, we are very strong and we believe in unionizing, but
201 we also believe in our communities." And he was the one that in 1981, he told he,
202 he says, "I want you to go serve on the Board of the United Way of Kauai." So, I
203 went to my first meeting and it was held, I'll never forget this, at the First Hawaiian
204 Bank in their little boardroom. There were 22 people there, there was 21 members
205 of business and me (laughs). Fortunately, Tom Whittemore was, that was his first
206 meeting also, and he walks in and Tom has this great big smile on his face and he
207 walks right up to me and he says hello, and he asks me who I was and everything.
208 He then he says so what do you do, and I told him, "Oh, I'm a business agent for
209 the ILWU. And he smiled, and he says, "Ohhh, they're gonna love this!" (laughs)
210 And when I went in, we had to introduce ourselves, he went first.

211So when I introduced myself, the room was as quiet as can be, not a person said
212 anything. It was really quite . . . I looked at him [Tom] and I said, "Did I say
213 something wrong?" And he starts laughing. He says, "Nah, they'll warm up to you."
214 They sure did, yeah. They forgot what I did and welcomed me. So I started off there
215 in my community work. Right after that my oldest son joined Boy Scouts of America.
216 So, I joined Boy Scouts of America! And I'd been, I served on United Way for 22
217 years, in many different capacities, including uh, I served as board presidents three
218 times. I served as a campaign chairman four times, helping to raise the funds. And
219 then Boy Scouts, well, I started out just as a community person with Troop 133,
220 which is interesting because I was a Boy Scout in the same troop, in the same
221 capacity my son was in, and I loved it, yeah. And eventually, I even became a
222 scoutmaster and then I went on to work for, actually volunteered, for the [Boy
223 Scouts] council. So I'd on the council a long time. I've doing it now about 26 years
224 now.

225

226Interviewer: Are you still involved? You we're recognized by them, weren't you?

227

228Tommy: Yes, yes. I'm still involved, yeah, they still call on me. I still do what ever they
229 want me to do. It's a great organization, yeah.

230

231Interviewer: Back to the ILWU, can you tell me, what was maybe the most memorable or
232 notable part of that career?

233

234Tommy: Oh! Lots of things. Well, after serving for a few years on the United Way, you
235 know I got to know a lot of the important people in the community. Hobey Goodale
236 and I became really good friends. And Hobey used to encourage me, he says, you
237 know, you got to go out and do more. So, I tell him, I says, I have my job, my family
238 was growing and all, I had a couple more kids and . . . so I says, You know, Hobey, I
239 don't have time. He says, No, you can always find time. And so he always
240 encouraged me to do other things. Then came the appointment from then mayor
241 Tony Kunimura to serve on the Planning Commission.

242And I think my time on the Planning Commission as a volunteer was, I had some of the
243 best times of my life then.

244

245Interviewer: And that was in the 1980s?

246

247Tommy: Yes, yeah. It was a great time. I really, really enjoyed that, I met some really
248 wonderful people. But it was kind of a turbulent time, also. Because you know, the
249 plantations were going down, developers were coming in, you had really big
250 developments that we were tasked to hear. Meetings used to go all day, sometimes
251 all morning. We'd go to three or four 'o clock in the morning with hearings. Lots and
252 lots of development going on at that time.

2530:19:38.7

254Interviewer: Did you feel a lot of pressure from the public, from other parties, in some of
255 the decisions you had to make?

256

257Tommy: Well, you had pressure from work, because a lot of our members needed a
258 place to go to work, they were losing their jobs. So you had to worry about, you
259 know, maybe this new development will provide work for these people. So there's
260 pressure is this a good idea? There's pressure from your love of the land. This is my
261 home, I love this place. There's nowhere else in the world that I would rather live.
262 So, you worry, are you making the right decision? Is this really what you want to do?
263 What is going to happen in the future? Because what you do today, is going to
264 affect what happens later on. Am I going to leave my children a better place than
265 what I had? So, there was tremendous pressure there. And of course, you know, I
266 am Hawaiian, so I had my (chuckles) Hawaiian community after me, telling me, you
267 know, protect the 'aina, you know. And so that became . . . uh, many sleepless
268 nights, I can tell the truth, many, many sleepless nights. So you worry about
269 everything that you did. I mean, those decisions that we made, seriously, were
270 made, but a lot of concern, a lot of thought, a lot of research, a lot of talking. I'd go
271 see my dad, and you know . . . I served with Andy [Bushnell], he can tell you it was
272 a really tough time, it really was. But I think we did the best we could. We always, I
273 know, we always had in my what are we going to do for our people. And it was a
274 hard balance, it was a hard thing to balance. Yes, it really was, because many times
275 development was going to provide far more jobs than there were people, which
276 meant you're gonna bring people in. You going to bring people in, you're going to
277 have to build homes for them, you have to house them somewhere. Then that
278 means the traffic is going to get worse. Do we have enough water? What about all
279 the infrastructure? Who's going to build that? Who's going to be responsible?
280 Where we going to get the firemen, and the policemen, and the EMT's, and will the
281 hospitals . . . all those things come into play when you make these decisions.

282

283Interviewer: Well, standing here, today and looking back at those decisions, and all the
284 former administrations, how do you think Kauai has fared?

285

286Tommy: Umm . . .

287

288Interviewer: Is there anything in particular you want to say about . . .

289

290Tommy: Yes, I think we did alright. I think most of the development is OK. Except that I
291 really believe that . . . you know, we used to push the "Put the roads in, get the
292 infrastructure in," and of course, they didn't. You know. And that's the unfortunate
293 thing. It just didn't happen. And sometimes, I think we placed a little too much trust
294 in the developer that they would do what they say would do, and they don't
295 sometimes, you know. Many times, actually. Which is unfortunate. And sometimes
296 government fails because they don't make sure those things are enforced. You
297 know? We can only put in the requirements, you can put the conditions in, and if no
298 one follows up, and goes out to make sure they're being met, you have problems
299 that we have today. With our traffic. And I really don't think that what we have in
300 Kapaa Town should ever have happened. It shouldn't have. But unfortunately, it just
301 didn't work out. And I'm sorry about that. That . . . I regret that a lot.

302

303Interviewer: Do you mind my asking . . . I learned that you ran for a position, speaking of
304 government, for state senator in 1998?

305

306Tommy: Yes, I did.

307

308Interviewer: Can you tell us a little about that? What motivated you to run? And had you
309 made it, what would you have wanted to accomplish?

310

311Tommy: I went to the legislature one day. Now, Lehua Fernandes-Salling was the then
312 state senator, and she was my classmate, we grew up together, her dad and my
313 dad were old, old friends. We went to the same schools. I mean, literally, I
314 remember, when we graduated from Kapaa, her father would not let her go out
315 unless I picked her up and I brought her home, because he knew me. So, we were
316 really close. And I went to the legislature to go talk to her, I don't remember what the
317 issue was because she wouldn't see me. And I was there and I saw her walking into
318 her office and I went into her office, she wouldn't see me. So, I came home and I
319 talked to some of the guys in the office, and I says, she wouldn't talk to me! I was
320 there, there was no reason for her to . . . I can't believe she wouldn't do this! So,
321 other people were talking to me about it, and I went to my Hawaiian Homes
322 Commission meetings, I was a member of the Hawaiian Homes Commission at the
323 time, and I was talking with the guys there, and they says, Why don't you run
324 against her? Teach her a lesson. I says Nah, I'm not a politician, I don't wanna be a
325 politician, I says." But they said, No, think about it. At least, you'd be accessible to
326 the people because Lehua by that time wasn't coming home very often. We never
327 got to talk to her very much. So, I thought about it then I talked with my wife, and I
328 talked to my kids and they all said, Well, Dad, if you really want to do it, you've been
329 doing this stuff all your life. You'd know what to do. You wanna try it, we'd be right in
330 back of you.

3310:22:48.6

332Tommy: Well it was kind of late in the political season. I think I filed two days before the
333 deadline. But after great thought, and talking to a lot of people, I decided I'd give it a
334 try. 'Cause I really felt that we needed better representation, we needed someone
335 who would listen to the people. Unfortunately, I didn't have a dime to my name
336 (laughs) and it's very hard to run a political campaign without any money. I
337 managed to raise some money, and I walked this island, I walked everywhere I
338 could go. I talked to as many people as I could. And I remember talking to some of
339 my friends with the Democratic Party and they said, "WHY did you start so late?" I
340 says Well, I made up my name now, so I'm going to go try it. And they says, well,
341 you know we made our commitments, and a lot of them told me we're already
342 committed to Jonathan [Chun] and I says, No, I'm not asking you to change your
343 mind, I'm just telling you this is what I'm going to do. And I'm going to give it my best
344 shot, and try as best as I can. And so we did. We worked really hard. My kids were
345 great, I mean, they were just wonderful. My wife would get me up at 3 o'clock in the
346 morning, then we'd drove up the Westside and campaign out there and . . . the best
347 party of the campaign, I'll never forget, I was walking in Kalaheo. Way in the back, in
348 the mountainside. And it's really hilly. And it was HOT. And I'm walking by myself
349 because we're all spread out, and I came, I looked up and I came around a bend
350 and I looked up at this steep driveway, with a fence. And there's a lady like this at
351 the fence looking down at me. And I smiled and I walked up that hill, and when I got
352 to the top, she says, "I was wondering if you were gonna come and say hello to me.
353 She says, if you didn't, I would not consider voting for you. I said No, I'm here, I'd
354 better go say hello, and I did. But that I thought that was the best, it was so funny,
355 because I said to myself, God, that was a long walk! (laughs) But it was great, it was
356 fun, it was hard work. I got to know a lot of people, I spent a lot of time all over this
357 island, seeing more than I'd seen in my entire lifetime. And it gave me a real
358 realization of how important our government is in our lives. And how important it is
359 to participate. And although I lost, it wasn't something I felt bad about. You know, I
360 came in second, there were three of us, and I came in second. And I did pretty
361 good, I thought, considering. But it was a great experience. And it also taught my
362 children about the importance of being a good citizen, of participating, of not just
363 sitting back, you know, of sharing how important our community is. And so I think,
364 that alone was worthwhile. Just for that alone, it was well worth it.

365

366Interviewer: Yes, I was going to ask you what did you learn from it, what did you take
367 away from it, but it actually was your kids.

368

369Tommy: Yeah, yeah, just the family and them learning. My nieces and nephews were
370 working with me. They all came, all campaigned with me. We walked all over the
371 island. They learned something about government. If I'd won, it'd have been great
372 too, because I would have had the opportunity to really represent the island. There's
373 so much I was interested in. Having children, you're interested in the educational
374 system. Which I really think needs help. I mean, really needs it. It needed it then, it
375 really needs a lot more now. I mean, I think we need to make our educational
376 system so much better than we have it today. And make college more available to
377 all of our kids. It's so important for them to learn. You cannot do well in this world if
378 you don't have that knowledge, you can't gain that knowledge without having a good
379 educational system. And people may say that this is something that a union guy
380 should never say, but we need to revamp our teachers our tenured. We need to
381 revamp the way our teachers are given the opportunity to improve themselves, and
382 if they do, to have the opportunity to move up. You know, it shouldn't be just I've
383 been here 30 years, therefore, I deserve this." You know, "I'm a good teacher, I
384 have gone to school, I've improved myself, therefore, I should get this." And
385 sometimes unionism blocks that. It does.

386

387Interviewer: How so?

388

389Tommy: Well, 30 years seniority is 30 years of seniority, and that means you get to
390 choose the plums, right? That shouldn't be. If you have a lot of education, you've
391 gone to school, you've improved yourself, you've shown that you have the ? and the
392 desire to do a better job, you should be given the opportunity to do that. You
393 shouldn't be held back. And that's one of the things I was in trouble with being a
394 union leader. Is how do you give people who are truly deserving, the opportunity to
395 move up? To be in positions where they can influence others, instead of simply
396 basing everything on seniority. Which is how we do things. I protected everyone's
397 seniority for many years so I know what happens. But there has to be some way we
398 could have worked that out.

399

4000:31:09.6

401Interviewer: Since we've gone back to the union, I was going to ask . . . well, here's a
402 quote from Andy; I'm just going to read it. He says that in the 1940s and 1950s, the
403 ILWU was noted for its concern for social justice, it sounds like that was your
404 primary motivation . . .

405

406Tommy: Yes

407

408Interviewer: ... for issues that went beyond wages, working conditions. Do you still find
409 that true?

410

411 Tommy: Umm . . . not so much. I think, I think all unions have that problem. They've
412 pretty much gone away from that, which is unfortunate. You don't find leaders taking
413 part in active roles in community organizations. You know, I was honored by the
414 union itself for my role in scouting. I received an award from them . . . I'm not even
415 sure the award is given out anymore. 'Cause I don't know of any union leaders that
416 do it. In my time, lots of us did it. You know, when I was at the United Way, I took an
417 active role because that was I was told to do, you've got to be active. We don't do
418 that anymore. Part of it is because unions are under attack. They are no longer as
419 powerful as they use to be. I don't care what you read in the papers, it's a fact.
420 They're not as powerful as they used to be because membership has gone down,
421 you know? When I was here in the office at Hardy Street, 5000 members. I think
422 we have 1800 today. The ILWU used to have close to 60,000 members. [Today] We
423 have 22,000? So, that affects everything, and you gotta try to protect yourself there,
424 and so they no longer participate as much as they used to. You don't see them in
425 boards and commissions anymore. There wasn't anybody on commission on this
426 island, in the 1980s that you wouldn't find an ILWU, whether it was an official or a
427 member, serving on that. We all served. That was our civic duty. You had to serve!
428 You didn't say no.
429 It doesn't happen anymore, you don't see that anymore. And so I think we aren't as
430 involved in social issues as we used to be, and I think that hurts us. I think that's
431 something that . . . because you don't know the pulse of the people. You don't know
432 what people are talking about. You don't know how they're struggling. You don't
433 know the importance of things that are going on in government. You just cannot say
434 I'm gonna back this guy, back this guy up, and say that's enough. You actually have
435 to be involved in that so you know why you doing what you're doing. And they
436 simply don't have that. And in the early 40s and 50s, you they were highly trained.
437 We all were. When I became a member, we were always trained. They sent you out
438 there to learn all these things. They don't time to train leaders any more. So
439 leadership is very limited. We have some good ones, but it's very limited. They no
440 longer have the kind of experience. And it used to be that you came from the
441 working ranks, you know? So that you knew what it was all about. Then came later
442 years, when they started taking leaders right out of college, who had very little
443 experience in the union movement. And it doesn't work. Because you simply don't
444 understand.
445
446 Interviewer: I also wanted to ask you about the Hawaiian Homes Commission, and did
447 that come about?
448

449 Tommy: After I got through with my service on the Planning Commission, Gov.
450 Cayetano, whom I campaigned for a couple times, he saw me--he was here on
451 Kauai--he says, "You're Hawaiian, aren't you?" I says, "Yeah, I'm Hawaiian." He
452 says, "You want to serve on the commission?" "Not especially." (laughs) I says,
453 "You know, Governor, I've been doing a lot of volunteer work and that's not some--"
454 He says, "No, it's your people, you've got to get involved, do something for your
455 people." I says, "Okay . . . I'll think about it." So then he saw me again, and he says,
456 "You ready?" Is says, "Okay, I'll give it a shot, I'll try." I had NO idea what I was
457 getting myself into, none whatsoever. And the only thing he said to me was, "Make
458 sure you do something for these people, they need something to be done." And so I
459 says, "Well, I'll do my best." And so, you know, I went for my interview, and they
460 asked me a few questions, they said OK. And so I started going to these meetings
461 and it's every single month you're flying somewhere. 'Cause you meet on every
462 single island and you meet with all the communities, you know. Fortunately, people
463 knew my dad. Or they one of my brothers who went to Kamehameha Schools and
464 stuff like that. So, or they're related to me. I had met more relatives throughout this
465 state that I never knew, who came up to me and says, "I'm a Contrades, I'm related
466 to you." Then they'd tell me how, and I'd be oh my goodness! So you learn more.
467 But those eight years were great years because it really brought me back to who
468 you really are. I always knew who my family was, my dad always made us learn.
469 knew that our family traces its ancestry all the way back to Tahiti. I knew that my
470 ancestors landed at the mouth of the Wailua River, and came here. I knew all of
471 those things, but I became far more understanding about how Hawaiian people feel
472 about the land. And so it became far more important to me. And my time there, I
473 loved every moment of it, it was a lot of work, because there was so much to try to
474 get done. Not only . . . I often argue with people about this. You know, you hear
475 about the waiting list? Do you know--this is a fact--do you know that every single
476 person on that waiting list has been given at least two or three offerings? So that
477 waiting list is not truly a waiting list. It's a list of people who have the right to
478 property, but want certain property. And I'll give you a personal example. My wife is
479 on the list, she has turned down offerings six times already. But she does not want
480 to live in Anahola! She wants live in Wailua. So we're waiting for Wailua to come up.
481 You know? People wait for the places they want to be in. So to say that they've
482 never been given the opportunity, is not fair. They've all been given the opportunity.
483 It's not the one they want. Which is okay, as far as I'm concerned. You don't people
484 to live where they don't want to live. You want them to go where they want to be.
485

4860:38:34.3

487 Tommy: But we also-- our commission at that time--Kane Watson [spelling ?] went off
488 and Ray Sun [Spelling?] was appointed director. And he was a very compassionate
489 man. and he was also a developer. So he understood development. He understood
490 how to get things done. And one of the things that was very interesting about the
491 Hawaiian Homes at that time was-- you know, we didn't have to go to the County to
492 get permits. We could build whatever we wanted, where we wanted. We didn't have
493 to worry about those things. And then my dad's teachings came into me, and I says,
494 We can't be like that, we cannot be that way. We do not live in a vacuum, we live in
495 a community. I says we have to do the same thing everybody else does. We have t
496 go to each county an d we have to tell the counties, "Look, we want to be able to
497 produce homes for our people, but we want to make sure that they are built
498 properly, that they're permitted properly, that we have roads that are properly done,
499 we have water systems that are properly done, that we have sewage treatment that
500 is properly done, we want to part of the community. 'Cause one of the things that
501 happened one time, was we gonna do a development. And the people around just
502 fought us. They did not want the Hawaiian Homes to build a community there. And
503 so I talked to them, we all did. "Why?" And they says, go and look at what you have
504 today. You know? Go and look at Papakoliau [Spelling?], which at that time was not
505 a nice place to be at. (Which has changed tremendously since. It's a great place,
506 right now.) "Go and look at what you're doing, we don't want that kind of community
507 here. So, we said we have to change how we do things and so we did! We now get
508 permits; we now do all subdivisions like everyone else does. Our roads are built
509 properly, we have water systems, we have walkways, we have lights, we have
510 everything in there. And so the communities are changing. If you go into a
511 community today that's being built, they have associations, they have rules, you
512 know? They teach. They have this great organization called HOPE, where the
513 homeowners, they teach you what it means to be a homeowner. In the old days,
514 they all looked upon it, "it's no my house. It belongs to this agency. It's their house.
515 They have to take care of it, I'm not going to take care of it, it's not mine." You can
516 now earn equity in your home, you know? You do, you earn equity in your home.
517 Those things never happened before. But it took a tremendous change, which is
518 fortunate I was sitting there able to be part of that. And we had a commission that
519 was really good with a leader that was really good.

520

521 And then the Governor had to retire and Linda Lingle took over. So, I thought okay, my
522 time is up. And Micah Aikane [Spelling?] became the director. And the first thing, he
523 came to us, he said, "Would you guys consider staying on?" I says, well, I'm not a
524 Republican, I'm a Democrat. I told him, I says, "In fact, you're the only Republican
525 here!" And he says, "No, no, you're doing a good job, and the Governor doesn't
526 care." And I met her, and I talked with her, and I got to really like her, and she gave
527 me another chance at it. And I stayed on for the second four years. And at that time,
528 one of the things we did was, of course, we really wanted the development, we
529 started building many, many homes. The Governor was able to secure money
530 through her friends with the President, secure money that helped us to build lots of
531 homes and stuff. But we also did something that is really important that people don't
532 know about is, we had a tremendous delinquency rate. Families were not paying,
533 some of them 10 years in delinquent. And we said we had to stop this. We have to
534 have our people know that they must responsible. so we started going after these
535 people and getting them to pay. slowly, but we got them to pay. Brought the
536 delinquency rate way down. Now what that means is, when they pay we can take
537 that money and build another house. So that someone else can come and live here.
538 So, slowly but surely, when you get that down, monies are going in, you have funds,
539 you can go and build more homes. And we have funds that we can use to put
540 infrastructure in and to make sure we the water . . . the electricity . . . the roads. And
541 then that improved things so that, you know, Anahola has gotten so much bigger.
542 Kekaha has gotten so much bigger. We built our first homes in Hanapepe. All of that
543 was the result of how we changed the way we did things from the previous
544 administration. And it became . . . now it's hard to keep up with what they're doing!
545 They're doing so much.

5460:43:38

547 And I'm still, today, involved because I started with the help of Micah, and Dr. Michael
548 Chun from Kamehameha Schools, and Riley Smith from the Big Island. We formed
549 a non-profit organization that no one knows about (laughs), it's called Nakupa'a o
550 Kuhio, and we are able to obtain funds from the federal government. And we do
551 water infrastructure, putting water lines, and stuff. So, that is helping to continue
552 keep Hawaiian Homes growing, and so it lets me continue to help our people.
553 Something I don't think I'll ever stop doing.

554

555 It's a non-profit. Money is given to us. I'm responsible as the president, Dr. Chun often
556 signs off on it, so he's responsible, and Riley's responsible, because he's our
557 treasurer. But we get funds for, um, it's through the World Development Agency. We
558 get funds, and of course, the funds must be used in areas where we have lower
559 income. So it's very difficult to do on Oahu where the income is much higher. So
560 most of our work is done on the neighbor islands. Our first project was on Molokai.
561 We did the new waterline in Hoelehua [check spelling]. Spent a few million dollars
562 there, getting it done. And then part of the money is an outright gift, a grant. Part of
563 it is a loan. And so we pay off on the loan, our agency actually pays off the loan. We
564 take the funds that we gain from selling the water rights. We use that money to pay
565 off our loan. So, it's a lot of work.

566

567Interviewer: And this is ongoing?

568

569Tommy: Yes, ongoing, yes. We still, we have four project right now that we're going
570 through. So, that's great work, yeah.

571

572Interviewer: What are the most important issues you feel are facing the Commission
573 today? Sounds like you've done a lot of great work, but are there things undone or
574 issues that . . .

575

576Tommy: The Hawaiian Homes Commission? Lot's still to be done.

577

578Interviewer: Any that stand out for Kauai, in particular?

579

580Tommy: Yes! I'd like to see them do more with our agricultural land. You know, there's
581 a... you can get a lease for a home, but you can also get a lease for agricultural
582 land. And we do very little of that on Kauai. And we have lots of agricultural land. I
583 would like to see them take some of that land and offer it to the people so that they
584 can start farming. We have some land on the Westside that they ranch, but I'd like
585 to see more farming done. Anahola, just before I left, right as you enter Anahola on
586 the left hand side. We put up the fence line there. and what we're planning to do
587 and further in the back near the mountain there, we actually started. We started
588 taking smaller lots, you know, 5, 10 acres of land and you can use that for farming.
589 The serious problem we're faced with is water. Because after the plantations shut
590 down, the ditches fell into disrepair. There's quite a few reservoirs that haven't been
591 used so they've all dried up. So we're trying to get some funds to get some water
592 down into that area, so we can open up that land to farming. it's sitting there not
593 being used. It won't be developed for many, many years. so I was thinking, give it
594 out, for a few years at a time on a lease basis, and let them start farming. There's
595 some small work being done right now. There's some families that have already
596 started, but I would like to see that happen even more, give the families there the
597 opportunity to start raising vegetables, even it its for their home use. But why let the
598 land just sit there do nothing. Make use of it, you know? Clean it up, make use of it,
599 help feed families. Maybe start a little community association there with a farmer's
600 market or something to help them sell their products? There's so much more than
601 can be done that I'd like to see them do here on Kauai. and I hope they'll eventually
602 get to it. I mean, right now they're just so concentrated on building homes. I think
603 they need to spend a little time on the agricultural. and I think that'd be great on all
604 the islands. Not just Kauai, all the islands.

605

606Oahu, of course, is different. Yeah, you have to treat Oahu as a totally separate entity,
607 because of the amount of people there, and we don't have as much land on Oahu,
608 as we do on the neighbor islands. Yeah. Most of the land is concentrated on the
609 neighbor islands. That's where you do more of your agricultural subdivisions. I'd like
610 to see them do that. It'll be great.

6110:49:01.0

612[SHORT BREAK for water, but Carol continues rolling. During this break, Andy asked a
613 few questions.]

614

615Interviewer: Tommy, when were you born?

616

617August 28, 1949. I'm 61 years old.

618

619Interviewer: You're young!

620

621Tommy: I am!

622

623Interviewer: You are, yes! You've done a lot in those years. Now that was one of the

624 things, you know you talk about growing up, I don't want to interview, I want to sit

625 and talk story!

626

627[Laughter, the group continues . . .]

628

629Carol: You know, I haven't paused anything yet. Do you want to keep going?

630Rhea: Do you feel like going?

631Tommy: Ok, yeah! I'm fine.

632Andy: Are you ready, Rhea?

633Rhea: Yes, I am.

6340:50:04.0

635Interviewer: Bringing up O`ahu, that makes me think of the State Land Use
636 Commission. You are currently on that, you've served since 2005?

637

638Tommy: Yes.

639

640Interviewer: In 2009, you were reappointed.

641

642Tommy: Yes, I was.

643

644Interviewer: So, I would like to know how you got involved with that.

645

646Tommy: Yeah, when my term on the Hawaiian Homes Commission ended, I was so
647 looking forward to not to be involved, and just taking it easy. And by that time, I was
648 planning to enter into the deacon formation with the Catholic Church. So, I was not
649 looking to anything else. And Micah Kane called, and my wife--it was really funny--
650 my wife answered the phone and she said, "It says here, Micah Kane, do you want
651 to talk to him?" She says, "I know he's going to ask you to do something, I KNOW
652 he is." And I says, "Uhhhh..." And then she says, "Well, you'd better, since it's
653 Micah. Because we had become very good friends. He went to Kamehameha
654 Schools with my son, by the way." So I answer the phone and I says, "Yes?" He
655 calls me uncle, and he says, "Uncle Tommy? I want you to do something for me." I
656 says, NO, I don't want to do anything for you Micah, I am sorry!" He says, "Oh no!
657 Just listen, just listen!" I says, "But Micah, I don't wanna do anything." He says, "The
658 Governor really needs someone to serve on land use." And I says, "Oh, heavens
659 NO, not THAT." (laughs) "No, I don't wanna do that." And he says, Peter Nakamura
660 had just finished his two terms, so he'd done his eight years, you have to get off.
661 And so he says, "No, your name keeps coming up, and the Governor really wants
662 you to consider it." I says, "Well, I'll think about it." So, I talked with my wife. My wife
663 is a very precious human being. Without her, I would never have been able to do
664 what I've done in my life. and she says, "You know, Dad, if this is something you
665 wanna do, go ahead and do it." She says, "You love doing these things, why
666 wouldn't you want to do it." She says, "It's just another extension of your life, go
667 ahead." So, I says, okay, I call him back.

668 "My wife says it's alright." (laughs) He says, "Oh, great!" And then you know, they don't
669 tell you all of these things, then you got this tons of papers you have to fill out. Then
670 you have to go for an interview. I don't wanna be interviewed by anybody! And then
671 I went before the, uh, what was it, the I forget the name of the committee, but
672 fortunately Gary Hooser was there and he kind of protected me [laughs]. But they
673 ask you tough questions! You know, I was going, "I'm sorry but I don't know since I
674 don't the issues yet. Once I get on I'll learn the issues then I can probably tell you
675 what's going on." And I remember Kalani English asking me stuff about Maui and I
676 says, "I'm sorry, Senator, I know very little about what's going on in Maui. But if you
677 ask me about Hawaiian Homes, I can tell you." And so we all laughed, they
678 approved me, so I started. And I had no idea . . . people have no idea. The work. I
679 mean, one simple little subdivision will have stacks of paper this high! My office is
680 filled with land use commission issues. One EIS can be like four folders high. And
681 you know, you're going through them and I told one of the attorneys, that represents
682 one of these developers, I said, "Do you have a template that you all use? that you
683 simply all of these same stuff and you hope that nobody looks at 'em? Because, I
684 said, I see a lot of the same stuff over and over and over!" And he laughed, he says,
685 "Oh, no." I says, "You guys hire the same people, you got all the same guys, I look
686 at the same stuff. How you do this?" He says, no. But sometimes you run into the
687 exact same thing. I mean, it's crazy.

688
689 But it's so much work. And then the hearings you have to do. You know, I spend many,
690 many days away from home. Every week, we're on another island. Last week was
691 on O'ahu. This Friday, I fly to Kona. And you in meetings all day long. They told us
692 we'd be there until 7:00 at night, because there's so much to do. And you wonder to
693 yourself, I mean, where are all these people coming from who are supposedly going
694 to live in these homes? You know, where they coming from? What do we need this
695 for? And I've become, ah, very, very . . . jaded a little bit, I guess, when you listen to
696 some of these people. 'Course its always the same thing, and you know it's not
697 going to happen. So you ask them why, why are you doing this, why should I help
698 you? Why is it good for the people of the island? And then the people are far more
699 involved, which is great, it really is. I mean, it's hard to sit down and listen to 85
700 people testify. You think about 85 people, at 5 minutes apiece, with a break in
701 between, I mean, those are hours and hours and hours of testimony. But you hear
702 people with so much passion. You have to listen, you know. It's ok. We let 'em
703 testify. There's so much concern now about do we really need what is going on?

7040:55:49.3

705 So, it's become a very difficult position. And what I'm not afraid or ashamed to say that
706 I've really started to consider what I really want to continue, staying on this
707 commission. Because it just drags you down. All of us admit, that when we go home
708 after the two days of hearings, it takes you two or three days just to recover. You're
709 so exhausted. And your mind is worried about so many things. And you're so
710 concerned about how these people are really gonna do what they say they're gonna
711 do. For example, there are on the Big Island of Hawaii, there are literally thousands
712 of home sites that have been approved that have never been built. Why are you
713 going to approve more?? For whom? Or, for what?
714 You know, you have to ask yourself these questions? And so it becomes a real drain on
715 yourself, really it does. And you know, in today's world you have to be very careful
716 of who you talk to, when you talk to them, and why you talk to them. You can't even
717 talk to a fellow commissioner, unless it's just one on one. If there's more than two of
718 us in the room, we can't talk about stuff. So, it's really hard because you want to ask
719 them how you guys feel about this? What do we do? You know, and we're going to
720 be deciding on some big, big subdivisions on the Big Island, for example. What are
721 we going to do?
722
723 And so, I go home, take out my stuff, sometimes I spend three or four hours just going
724 over the material, reading it, asking questions, writing stuff down. Chairing these
725 meetings sometimes is so difficult, trying to be fair to everybody . . .
726
727 Interviewer: Talking about fairness, there's a question here from Andy. He says, do you
728 feel that Kauai and any of the other outer islands have sufficient power to ensure
729 that it is treated fairly? But that's your job. . .
730

731 Tommy: Oh, no. In a way, you're right, it's my job, but it's also the people's job. And I will
732 tell you this much, I am so proud of this, I really am. I've been a member of the
733 commission almost 6 years now. We have had two meetings on this island. Two.
734 One was the development down in Poipu--Knudsen, the 127 acres right in back of
735 St. Raphael's church, over there. Which they withdrew because they heard a little
736 voice in the back telling them, you're wasting your time. And then we had a meeting
737 here about the Seventh-day Adventist School, and the road they're suppose to put
738 in. We haven't had any meetings since. And its because the people here on Kauai
739 are very involved. And that's true! They're very involved, so developers know if they
740 gonna do something, they'd better be doing something really, really needed. Not
741 something that they're gonna get rich off of, but something that's needed for the
742 island. Or else the people are gonna come out and . . . I was so proud of the fact
743 that there are so many people who came to our field trip, when we did the field trip
744 down in Poipu. I mean, people came out! And the nice part was, they weren't nasty.
745 They weren't mean. They didn't chide anybody, they didn't jeer anybody, they didn't
746 boo anybody. They had really tough questions and they presented them and they
747 asked them. And they came to those hearings and they spoke well, and they spoke
748 with passion but not to the point where they're running anybody down. They didn't
749 do any of that. And so the commission heard all of that and said, "Whoa, Tommy.
750 The people here really care." "Yes, we do, we do care. We are about our land." And
751 so, you know, I think the people who are trying to develop had heard that this was
752 not the best thing to do and so it was withdrawn. I don't really think that's ever
753 happen in that area, there's too much archaeological things, it's just too precious a
754 place. I mean it is, it's just a beautiful, precious place. I mean there are things there
755 we cannot possibly lose, you know? The gravesites that are there, that we found,
756 the home sites, you know, just beautifully preserved, you know? You can't have
757 those things destroyed. So, yeah! I'm proud of the fact that the people of Kauai are
758 very involved. I love it! You know, when they came out, I was really proud and I got
759 lots of pats on my back, hey, your people are good! They are! We are good people
760 here, great people.

761 1:00:39.6

762 Interviewer: So how many years left do you have on the commission?

763

764 Tommy: Two.

765

766 Interviewer: Two years. And you're counting the minutes.

767

768 Tommy: I'm counting the seconds! I mean its a great thing to have, it's a wonderful
769 position, I've met many, many, many people. I've become friends with a lot, lots and
770 lots of people, but it's, ah, with my new work, the new part of my life, now it's
771 become very difficult to be away that often.

772

773 Interviewer: This is your involvement with the Church, your deaconship. Can you tell us
774 more about that? That's your here and now.

775

776 Tommy: That's my here and now.

777

778Interviewer: Can you tell us a little more about that?

779

780 Tommy: Well, um, I studied to be a Catholic priest. Those were great years, by the way,
781 lots of fun, yes. And then, I left the Church. I literally left the Church. Never went to
782 Church. Not even for Christmas, or Easter. I just left the Church, and I went on my
783 own way. Ummm. I don't think, I often ask my kids, I says, I did what I wanted to do.
784 And I thought I was living a good life. I had three kids. And then I got divorced from
785 my first wife. And life started changing. And you know, I was still very involved in the
786 community, I was still doing all my community work, I still loved it. But something
787 started to tell me that my life wasn't really fulfilled. And so, I met my present wife,
788 who is not Catholic [laughs], but she encouraged me to go. "You're searching for
789 something, why don't you go?" So actually, I attended churches all over the place,
790 looking for it. But my faith called me back. So after 15 years, I went back to my
791 Church. And I started becoming involved again. And my wife converted to
792 Catholicism, and as we started to go back to church, one day, the priest asked me,
793 say, you know, would you mind helping out a little bit here at church? And then a
794 fellow by the name of Leo Rapozo, ah, his son is Lenny Rapozo? The mayor's
795 Parks & Recreation? Well, Leo was a member of the same parish that I was at,
796 Immaculate Conception in Kapaia. And he comes and he says, "Tom, we need
797 somebody to serve in the church's finance committee. You meet once every quarter,
798 and it's a half hour meeting. No big deal." So, I said, okay Leo, I'll do that. so I did.
799 Then about six months later, "We need somebody to be a lector at Mass, can you
800 do the readings?" I says, "Oh, I can read, yeah I'll do that." And then one day, he
801 came up to me and says, "You know, there's this new program in the Catholic
802 Church. It's called the Dean Formation." Now, I studied to be a priest, I'd never
803 heard of a deacon before." And he says, "They're going to have a meeting, let's go
804 listen. I'll go with you." So his wife and my wife, the four of us went to this meeting.
805 They talked about this deacon program, and that the deacons are actually part of
806 the clergy in the Catholic Church. And he says, "You know, you were starting to
807 study to be clergy . . .?" "My kids are kinda young," I says, "Nah, I don't think so." so
808 I didn't join. A few years later, they came back again. And so he says, let's go again.
809 So I went, and he told me, "I'm really interested." And no he wasn't, he brought ME
810 there. And my wife and I agreed and we signed up. And so we went through four
811 years of education. Yeah. They have a program, it's called Deacon Formation. You
812 go to O`ahu, back to the old seminary where I used to live [laughs]. And one
813 weekend a month, from Friday to Sunday, you are in an intense educational
814 program. They teach you theology, philosophy, church history, all about the, what
815 your position is in the church, everything. And so we did that for four years. And
816 many times I wanted to leave. I really did. I'd tell myself, I don't know if this is what I
817 want to do. But we persevered. And I was ordained a deacon at St. Catherine's
818 Church, by Bishop Larry Silva on January 13, 2007. My mom died a year before,
819 she tried so hard, she wanted to be with me, but she died a year before I was
820 ordained. She was 92, she had a great life. But it was a wonderful day, but it has
821 nowhere been as great as the years that have followed. It has been a blessing, a
822 tremendous blessing. Because I've been able to help so many people. Which is
823 what I've been doing all my life, so it's just an extension of what I've always done.
824 And it's really interesting because my friends who are not Catholic, come to me for
825 help. It doesn't matter if you're Catholic or you're Buddhist or you're Mormon or

826 whatever. They come, and they ask you for help. I've met pastors from many
827 different religions, and become good friends with them, and so I see the face of
828 religion changing. They invite me to come to their services, I invite them to come to
829 ours. We even allow ministers from other faiths to come and participate in our
830 services. It's not unusual. So, I see things changing so wonderful, because it's no
831 longer you're this, you're that, and they put people in boxes. Get away from all of
832 those things.

833 So it's become a great happiness in my life. I'm very, very happy where I am right now.
834

835 And they still let me get involved in politics, they let me do that. Yeah! Ah, you know, I
836 did vote for Linda Lingle. I told everybody that, I thought she was a great governor.
837 I've no problem with her. But yes, that's what I do now.

838

839 1:07:09.0

840 Oral History Project 2010: Island Movers & Shakers of the 20th Century

841 Interviewer: Do you have a message for young people who are wanting to get their feet
842 wet in being involved in their community, politics, or interested in making a
843 difference, where they should start?

844

845 Tommy: Oh, yes! Anyone, all young people, should get involved in ANY kind of nonprofit
846 work. Nonprofit work is such a rewarding work. My kids always tell me [laughs], they
847 always tease me about this, "Dad, are you EVER going to do something where you
848 get paid? You know? Because all of these positions are not paid! I says, "No! It's not
849 the money that's important. For me, at least, it isn't. It's not the money that's
850 important. It's the relationships you build with people; it's the friendships that you
851 gain. It's the knowledge that you learn from being with everybody else. That's far
852 more important. And when you do work with a nonprofit when you're just volunteer,
853 and it's strictly to help someone else, what you get back in return is far greater than
854 you give. It really is. You know, I walk anywhere on this island, people say hello to
855 me. I've had people . . . one of my greatest experiences, I was at Foodland one day.
856 And someone was tugging at my shirt. What's going on, so I turn around. and there
857 was this young lady who I had helped with United Way, and she remembered me!
858 Now, she was a developmentally challenged person, but she remembered me. And
859 she called me, Mr. Tom. And she said, "Mr. Tom, do you remember me?" And I says,
860 "You know I met you, was it at Kauai Surf at a luncheon?" She says, "Yes!" and her
861 eyes lit up. "I just want to thank you, because you helped me." What greater feeling
862 can you possibly ever get? That somebody telling you that? Well, you know, when
863 one of my old scouts comes by, and he sees me and he stops me, and he goes,
864 "Oh Mr. Contrades! (Which I hate people doing, I hate being called Mr. Contrades, I
865 even told Carol that!) Mr. Contrades, I want you to meet my wife and my son. And
866 here's a young man, at the time he was a fireman, and he told me all about his life,
867 all the wonderful things that he said he'd learned when we went camping, boy scout
868 meetings and stuff, and his wife and his child, and you can't get a better reward than
869 that. You simply cannot.

870

871 And young people when they're starting out should look to do this, so they can learn
872 about their communities. It's important for them to know about their communities.
873 What's going on in their communities, what is important community, what needs to
874 be done in the community, where they should get involved in. and if you start in one
875 area, like I did many, many years ago, before you know it, it branches out and the
876 world just opens out to you. And it does. and the rewards you will get be far greater
877 than you will ever, ever, ever know. If I had known then, what I know now? I
878 probably would have done even more [Laughter]. Seriously, you know? Because it
879 is great, it is great. I have friendships that I would never, ever had made. I've met
880 people I'd have never met because of what I've done. I've been sent all over this
881 country into parts of the world that I never would have seen, if I didn't become
882 involved. So, if you're looking at service in terms of financial gain? Forget about it.
883 But if you're looking in terms of personal, spiritual gain, this is, this is it. And I always
884 tell my kids, you know, I could never have afforded to go some of the places I'd
885 been to, you know, I was sent there by a lot of these agencies to attended a
886 convention, or to serve somewhere. I wouldn't have done that. I would never have
887 seen the parts of the world that I've seen. I wouldn't have met Andy, wouldn't have
888 met you, wouldn't have met Carol. Think about that! It's all because of being able to
889 serve and give back and that's what its all about. It's giving back, you cannot simply
890 take, 'cause then its very empty. When you give back, you get back more. So it's
891 something they should all consider.

892
893 I'm very proud to say that all my children were involved in--and without my knowledge,
894 without my pushing them. And when my daughter graduated from Kamehameha
895 Schools, I was amazed at the amount of volunteer work she was involved in. You
896 know? And all of them were that way, every single one of them. I never knew my
897 youngest son was involved with Special Olympics. And then one day I had to take
898 him to the airport, and I says, "Where you going?" "I'm going to O`ahu." And then I
899 saw he was taking the Special Olympics kids to a bowling tournament, you know?
900 And he loved them! They all knew him, and they're hugging him, and he was happy.
901 You know, my daughter was in Special Olympics at Vidihna stadium when they had
902 the tournament there, the track and field stuff. I never knew these things. And so I
903 asked her, "So, what are you doing?" "We learned this from you."

904 1:12:35.6

905 Interviewer: Thank you, Tommy; I'm done with my questions. It has been wonderful,
906 thank you.

907

908 Interviewer: You have a question you've been burning to ask, Andy?

909 Andy: No, no, not now. I would hate to interrupt and start with some place else after this
910 ending, which was so perfect.

911

912 End 1:13:18.1